

Succinct Summaries

The ability to condense information into a format that preserves the original meaning but does so in fewer words than the original is an important skill in professional writing. Summarizing is not linear; it does not simply reduce the number of words in each paragraph. Instead, good summaries produce a thoughtful but streamlined and abbreviated version of an original.

To write a summary, follow these steps.

1. Read the original carefully and look up any words you do not understand. Note key words or phrases.
2. Isolate the selection's main idea, which is the primary point the author is making
3. List the ideas that support the main idea. Try to do this from memory so you are not tempted to use the exact wording from the original. You may find it helpful to limit each idea to one bulleted point.
4. Reread the selection to be sure you have a good understanding of its overall meaning.
5. Write the summary in your own words. Keep these points in mind as you write:
 - Start with a topic sentence that states the main idea clearly.
 - Include only essential information such as names, dates, facts.
 - Eliminate nonessential information such as examples and some descriptive details.
 - Use transitions to link ideas and to unify the summary.
 - Arrange the sentences in the most logical order for a reader who will come to the summary with no prior knowledge.

Using the selection below, write a summary of about 100 words.

"Acid rain" is precipitation with a high concentration of acids. The acids are produced by sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and other chemicals, which are created by the burning of fossil fuels. Acid rain is known to have a gradual, destructive effect on plant and aquatic life.

The greatest harm from acid rain is caused by sulfur dioxide, a gas produced by the burning of coal. As coal is burned in large industrial and power plant boilers, the sulfur it contains is turned into sulfur dioxide. This invisible gas is funneled up tall smokestacks and released into the atmosphere some 350-600 feet above the ground. As a result, the effects of the gas are seldom felt immediately. Instead, the gas is carried by the wind for hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles before it floats back down to earth. For example, sulfur dioxide produced in Pennsylvania at noon on Monday may not show up again until early Tuesday when it settles into the lakes and soil of rural Wisconsin.

Adding to the problem is the good possibility that the sulfur dioxide has undergone a chemical change while in flight. By simply taking on another molecule of oxygen, the sulfur dioxide could be changed to sulfur trioxide. Sulfur trioxide, when mixed with water, creates sulfuric acid—a highly toxic acid. If the sulfur trioxide enters a lake or stream, the resulting acid can kill fish, algae, and plankton. This, in turn, can interrupt the reproductive cycle of other life forms, causing a serious imbalance in nature. If the sulfuric acid enters the soil, it can work on metals such as aluminum and mercury and set them free to poison both the soil and water.

Damage from acid rain has been recorded throughout the world, from the Black Forest in Germany to the lakes in Sweden to the sugar maple groves in Ontario, Canada. The result is a growing concern among scientists and the general public about the increasing damage being done to the environment by acid rain.* (334 words)

* *From Writer's Inc.*